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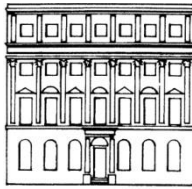
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War, Impression, Sound, and Memory: British Music and the First World War

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WAR, IMPRESSION, SOUND, AND MEMORY: BRITISH MUSIC AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

JEREMY C. DIBBLE

The First World War had a profound effect upon British music. Not surprisingly, the conflict brought a major interruption to the exponential creative invention that the nation had witnessed since the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Many of its most avid participants volunteered for the armed services, a responsibility which allowed little time for composition. Yet, in spite of the unexpected commitments that war brought, British composers across the spectrum of musical generations—which included late Victorians (such as Hubert Parry and Charles Villiers Stanford), well-established Edwardians such as Edward Elgar, and an abundant array of younger pupils from London’s musical conservatoires as well as from the provinces—found time and the need to express their impressions of the struggle. An understandable part of this creative response can be witnessed in the corpus of commemorative works such as elegies and funeral marches, expressions of heroism and courage, laments, and other outpourings of grief and loss. However, one of the most notable attributes of the range of musical utterances was a predisposition towards the enunciation of the war’s sights and sounds, a phenomenon which this article seeks to explore across a broad range of musical forms and genres. Moreover, in identifying these elements in music, some attempt is made to rationalize them in terms of individual and collective experience, both from the point of those who fought and took part in the military struggle, as well as those civilians at home who could only observe war from a distance.

One of the key preoccupations of First World War historians and commentators, and a principal focus of last year’s centenary of the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, has been the extraordinary speed with which Europe launched itself headlong into conflict in the months leading up to 4 August—the alliances, the misunderstandings, the mistrust, and the use of national propaganda. Tensions, of course,

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had existed for some time, notably in the arms race and the Dreadnought scare, and this did much to excite patriotic fervour at home. Sir Hubert Parry, Director of the Royal College of Music, former Heather Professor of Music at Oxford, a senior figure in the British musical establishment, and a man with strongly held liberal views, placed his faith in the power of democracy. His words about the role of a composer are enshrined in Ralph Vaughan Williams's 'An Autobiography', where he declared to his former pupil: 'Write choral music as befits an Englishman and a democrat.'¹ In that statement, his mission was to place the musician at the heart of society in which he or she had both a creative and moral duty to promulgate the values of music as an agency of self-improvement. On 4 February 1914 Parry had attended the Peace Centenary marking 100 years of peace between Britain and the United States. Writing in his diary that evening he noted: 'In afternoon to the Peace Centenary meeting at the Mansion House. Asquith much off colour. Archbishop [of Canterbury, Randall Davidson] flowery. The best speech was [Viscount] Bryce's, which was even amusing. He made some really good points, e.g. "War need never happen if people make up their minds they won't have it."'² And Parry held this firm belief until the outbreak of war.

Throughout his busy life, Parry had found time to provide music for five Greek plays for productions at Cambridge and Oxford. His last, for the Oxford University Dramatic Society, was written for Aristophanes' *The Acharnians*, which was produced at Oxford in February 1914. The choice of this play, which talks of the folly and waste of war, was not lost on its audience, and it had many resonances for Parry, who refused to believe that Britain would go to war with Germany. It was the habit of the producers of these performances, ever since they were revived in the 1880s, to infuse Aristophanes' text with contemporary political references and satirical jibes, almost in the manner of pantomime. For Parry, it was a welcome opportunity to voice his own opinions in musical terms, mostly through the medium of quotations, some of them subtle, others often rebarbative. As he detailed in the programme notes for the

¹ Ralph Vaughan Williams, 'A Musical Autobiography', in id., *National Music and Other Essays*, ed. Michael Kennedy (2nd edn. Oxford, 1987), 182.

² Diary of Sir Hubert Parry, 4 Feb. 1914, Shulbrede Priory, Sussex.

Oxford performances, the 'War Scares' were typified by the tune 'An 'orrible tale we have to tell'; 'The Acharnians (the Old Fighters of Marathon and Salamis)' by 'the British Grenadiers' and 'Rule Britannia'; the 'Pugnacious Athenians' by 'We don't want to fight, but by jingo if we do!' (sung in British pubs and music halls around the time of the Russo-Turkish War); 'Athenian Alliances' by 'La Marseillaise'; the 'Smooth-Tongued Cajoleries of Foreigners' by the waltz tune from Richard Strauss' *Der Rosenkavalier*; fear of the Spartans by 'Die Wacht am Rhein', the popular German anthem during the Franco-Prussian War; and the 'Obvious Answer to the War Scare' by the nursery rhyme 'O dear, what can the matter be'.³ Many of these citations appear in the orchestral overture, one of Parry's most satirical effusions, which, as he explained to his friend and colleague, Hugh Allen, he wanted 'to dedicate to the "Blue-Funkers"'.⁴

It therefore came as a terrific shock to Parry that Britain went to war with the Central powers in August 1914. For him, by admission a pro-Teuton, Germany's war machine seemed to embody the very fall of Lucifer. In addressing the students of the Royal College of Music in October 1914, he exhorted them to seek a heroism that was 'chivalrous and frank, modest and unaggressive, cheerful in adversity and unboastful in success'. 'True music', he added, 'can be inspired by such qualities, and when it really is so inspired it can convey a noble message to us'.⁵ Parry's musical reaction to the war was, for the most part, one of regret and inner sadness. His own particular brand of heterodoxy found voice in his one and only symphonic poem, *From Death to Life*, written in the early months of the war, a bipartite piece consisting of a lament followed by a more buoyant slow march, signalling a form of reveille. Of more vivid character, however, was his last choral work, *The Chivalry of the Sea*.

After the news of the Battle of Jutland in June of that year, Allen organized a concert 'to commemorate the officers and men of His Majesty's Fleet and of the Mercantile Marine who [had] fallen in the war, and to celebrate the achievements of the Empire at sea'.⁶ Using

³ See C. L. Graves, *Hubert Parry: His Life and Works*, 2 vols. (London, 1926), ii. 272-3.

⁴ *Ibid.* ii. 272.

⁵ *Ibid.* ii. 71.

⁶ Jeremy C. Dibble, *Hubert H. Parry: His Life and Music* (Oxford, 1992; rev. edn. 1998), 485.

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a poem specially written by the Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges, with whom Parry had collaborated on several earlier occasions, the work was composed in September 1916, three months after Jutland. In the work he was seized by the tragedy of the lonely, unrecorded graves of the mariners, especially that of Charles Fisher, a brilliant Oxford student who had died on HMS *Invincible*. In fact, Parry's naval ode had an even more personal significance for him in that his godson and namesake, Hubert Dannreuther, son of his former mentor, Edward Dannreuther, had also been on board *Invincible* as she blew up, and miraculously had been one of only five men to survive. The opening of the work, broad and stately, must surely have been intended to represent the sights and sounds of the vast naval procession of dreadnought battleships and battlecruisers as they sailed to meet the German fleet. Parry, who was a regular visitor to see London's popular cinematographs of the war, might well have seen footage of the great fleet as it passed through the Firth of Forth.

Parry ultimately believed that Britain's war effort was a just cause, unlike his son-in-law, Arthur Ponsonby, whose Union of Democratic Control advocated non-involvement. The choral song 'Jerusalem', composed in March 1916 and written at the behest of Bridges and the Fight for Right movement, was designed for communal singing to bolster the morale of the population. Yet in 1917 Parry resigned his membership of Fight for Right, probably because he was uncomfortable with the notion of national propaganda. 'Jerusalem' today is very much associated with patriotic fervour and the sounds of the Last Night of the Proms, but its First World War origins are less well known.

Parry's colleague at the Royal College of Music, the Irishman Charles Villiers Stanford, took a particularly active creative stance during and after the war. Works such as his *Fifth Irish Rhapsody*, dedicated to Lord Roberts and the Irish Guards, combined his own national support for the regiment (through the use of Irish folk songs associated with war and victory) with his own pugnacious belief in the Unionist cause for Ireland. Other works, such as the powerfully English tone poem, *A Song of Agincourt*, reveal his British fealty in its commemoration of those who fought and died through the agency of the 'Agincourt Song', a medieval melody written to celebrate the victory of Henry at Agincourt in 1415. Stanford's *Songs of the Fleet*, arguably even more evocative of British naval resources than Parry's

Naval Ode, were originally composed for the Jubilee Congress of Naval Architects in 1910, but when this was postponed owing to the death of the king, the work was premiered at the Leeds Festival in 1910. Designed as a sequel to the composer's *Songs of the Sea* of 1904, Stanford drew on Henry Newbolt's poetry, inspired by a visit to the Channel Fleet in 1908 during a nine-day manoeuvre. Spending time aboard HMS *Hibernia*, Newbolt learned to appreciate at first hand the ritual of life on a pre-dreadnought battleship. This was captured particularly vividly in Stanford's opening song, 'Sailing at Dawn', which depicts the sounds of the fleet 'stirring from their sleep, Cables all are rumbling, anchors all aweigh'.⁷

The Songs of the Fleet had a particular resonance during the war, not least the concluding song, 'Farewell', which became a contemporary funeral oration, sung at the concert of the 'Seven Divisions' who fought at Mons and Ypres at the Royal Albert Hall on 15 December 1917. It was later turned into a piano piece as a tribute to Lord Kitchener, who died during a diplomatic mission to Russia in 1916. *The Songs of the Fleet* was one of several works Stanford wrote in connection with the war. Though intended for the Boer War, his choral setting of Henley's poem 'The Last Post' was taken up with alacrity during the First World War, particularly since the entire work is based on the music of the well-known bugle call, scored for a real bugle in Stanford's score. Even more realistic in this depiction of army life was Stanford's direction in the score that, in the last part of the work, 'the bugle should play *ad libitum* in quick free time' with no metrical correspondence with the orchestra; moreover, the player was 'to be placed at a distance from or behind the platform'.⁸ A similar effect was created in Stanford's orchestration of the last two movements of his *Organ Sonata No. 2*, subtitled *Eroica*, which he dedicated to the Principal of the Paris Conservatoire, Charles Marie Widor, and the French army at Verdun.⁹ After a first movement which attempted to capture the ruins of Rheims Cathedral, a powerful historical symbol of French defiance encapsulated in Stanford's

⁷ Henry Newbolt, *Poems New and Old* (London, 1912).

⁸ Charles Villiers Stanford, *The Last Post*, vocal score (Boosey & Hawkes: London, 1900), 24.

⁹ This was recently broadcast for the first time on BBC Radio 3 with the Ulster Orchestra conducted by Howard Shelley.

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quotation of the old French tune O FILII ET FILIAE ('O sons and daughters let us sing, Alleluia'), a solemn march includes nocturnal strains of 'La Marseillaise' on solo muted trumpets. This quotation subsequently acts as a prelude for the 'Heroic Epilogue', in which various strains of 'La Marseillaise' coalesce symphonically to form a full rendition of the French national anthem at the conclusion.

Other sounds and impressions of the war were evoked in further works by Stanford. As an Irishman he was notably supportive of the Irish Guards, and his *Fifth Irish Rhapsody* of 1917 was dedicated to the regiment, its symphonic structure made up of a range of Irish folk tunes closely associated with war, lament, and courage. One should also not forget Edward Elgar's involvement in Britain's musical war effort. His choral trilogy, *The Spirit of England*, is probably his best known work of the period, but less well known is his symphonic prelude *Polonia*, written in tribute to the many Polish refugees in London, and more unusual, a recitation for speaker, soprano, and orchestra, *A Voice in the Desert*, first produced at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London in January 1916. A setting of the Belgian poet Émile Cammaerts, the tableau attempts to draw a picture of the sights of a ravaged Belgium, the numbed air of a village close to the battlefield broken only by the redemptive strains of a girl's song.

The aftermath of war was also a powerful stimulus for Stanford. Parry had died only four weeks before the Armistice, so the expression of the older generation's loss was left primarily to him in works such as the orchestral tone poem *A Song of Agincourt* of 1919, dedicated to the students and staff of the Royal College of Music, based throughout symbolically on the medieval Agincourt song sung after Henry V's victory in 1415. On 11 November 1920 the first ceremony of the Unknown Warrior took place at Westminster Abbey, the vivid impression of which moved Stanford to set C. J. Darling's poem 'At the Abbey Gate', first published in *The Times* on 26 October 1920, as a memorial to the Unknown Warrior. Stanford's work, a substantial slow march in the form of a choral scena, attempts in orchestral terms to portray the cortège to the Abbey, the firing of the guns, the files of silent people processing past by the tomb, while the central vocal paragraph enacts a dialogue between the Unknown Warrior and those left to grieve, embodying a cathartic process of collective mourning which Britain had not experienced hitherto. Lillian Elkington's symphonic poem of 1921, *Out of the Mist*, also attempted

to evoke a picture of the warship that brought the body of the Unknown Warrior to Dover coming through the Channel in the mist.

Stanford, like Parry, had been a member of the teaching staff at the Royal College of Music since its inception in 1883, and he had witnessed several generations of composers and performers enrich the ranks of society with a new energy and attitude to music's importance as a civilizing and democratic force. A consequence of this desire to see music as an indispensable part of life, with the role of the musician being considered as significant as any of the traditional professions, was also to see the same generations volunteer for active service. And many did join up, which meant that the production of music during the war from these younger generations was reduced to a minimal level. One of the most poignant products of the war was Frederick Kelly's *Elegy, In Memoriam Rupert Brooke* for harp and strings. A member of the 'Latin Club', Kelly enjoyed the company of a group of young intellectuals, including the poet Rupert Brooke and composer Charles Denis Browne, who were caught up in the disastrous Dardanelles campaign in 1915.¹⁰ Brooke died of disease on a French hospital ship even before the fighting began; Kelly and Browne were among those who buried him on the island of Skyros. Browne was killed at Achi Baba on 4 June 1915 and Kelly was wounded and evacuated to Alexandria where, in June, he composed the *Elegy* to Brooke, who had been buried in an olive grove. The work, a tender tone poem, was intended to capture the scene and the sound of the rustling trees and the rich scent of thyme, as Kelly himself remembered: 'The body lies looking down the valley towards the harbour, and, from behind an olive-tree bends itself over the grave as though sheltering it from the sun and rain. No more fitting resting-place for a poet could be found than this small grove, and it seems that the gods had jealously snatched him away to enrich this scented island.'¹¹

¹⁰ The 'Latin Club' was the soubriquet given to a group of scholar-soldiers who were part of the Hood Battalion on board ship on the way to the Dardanelles in 1915. The group included not only Brooke and Browne, but also Arthur Asquith (son of the prime minister) and Patrick Shaw-Stewart (the brilliant classicist, poet, and author of the war poem 'Achilles in the Trench').

¹¹ Therese Radic (ed.), *Race Against Time: The Diaries of F. S. Kelly*, entry for Friday, 23 Apr. 1915 (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2004), 382.

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Kelly was himself killed in the last battle of the Somme at Beaucourt-sur-Aube on 13 November 1916. George Butterworth, who seems to have found purpose in the war, was also killed earlier in the Battle of the Somme. He produced no music after the war began, but his settings of A. E. Housman, whose *Shropshire Lad* poetry was carried in many Tommies' knapsacks, also acquired a strong association with the war. Housman's eerily prophetic poetry talked of young men from Britain's declining agrarian culture going to war and death. There were many settings of Housman before and, indeed, after the war—one thinks of Ivor Gurney, Vaughan Williams, Ernest John Moeran, C. W. Orr, and John Ireland, all of whom, save Ireland, fought in uniform—but it was Butterworth's true understanding of Housman's Heine-esque irony and artless handling of the poet's folk-like scansion that gave his own *Shropshire Lad* settings a particularly eloquent post-war poignancy. One song, 'On the idle hill of summer', depicts a pastoral scene of the lad dreaming on the Shropshire slopes in the summer heat, yet, in this fevered sleep suggested by Butterworth's manipulation of whole-tone movement and advanced harmonic aggregates, the sound of a distant drummer excites memories of the sounds of bugles and fifes in the heat of battle.

One of the more elegiac expressions of the First World War was Herbert Howells's expression of loss at the death of Francis Purcell Warren during the Battle of the Somme. Howells, who was considered one of Stanford's most brilliant students, had not been able to join the army in 1914 because of poor health. Instead he corresponded with many of his student colleagues at the front, notably his Gloucester confrère, Ivor Gurney. The loss of Warren, enshrined in Howells's *Elegy for Strings*, remains an affecting reminder of youthful death and promise. Of more immediate experience, however, are the turbulent sounds and progressions of his *Third Rhapsody* in C sharp minor for organ, which was written during a Zeppelin raid in York in 1918. In this work Howells came closest to the expression of something more immediately physical.

One of the more onomatopoeic attempts to portray the sound, atmosphere, and chaos of battle, written towards the end of the war, was Josef Holbrooke's Debussy-inspired prelude *Barrage*, which he dedicated to the Royal Regiment of Artillery. A brilliant pianist and prolific composer, Holbrooke had spent much of his life inveighing against the British public's neglect of native musical talent and their

favouritism towards German music. When war broke out in 1914, this sense of chauvinism escalated in *British Music Versus German Music*, a series of five essays published in *The New Age*.¹² *Barrage*, a virtuoso composition of considerable technical display, explores something of the relentless, percussive, yet co-ordinated volley fire of the many artillery guns, not least the screaming trajectories of shells, the explosions, and the sense of savage onslaught heightened by Holbrooke's cadenza-like, quasi-improvisatory conception. The piece may also have expressed something more bellicose in his cause to promote the value of British music over that of Germany.

Though clearly an autonomous work, Holbrooke's *Barrage* has a visual as well as an aural dimension not far removed from the silent film, though if the printed version of Haydon Augarde's 'Descriptive Fantasia', *Battle in Mid-Air* of 1914 is anything to go by, then here we see a rapid medley of different musical genres, hymns, national anthems, popular tunes, rapid figurations, chromatic scales, and many other harmonic and gestural clichés gleaned from late Romantic musical vocabulary closely juxtaposed with replete prescriptive accounts of the unfolding drama of a dog-fight. Such techniques were common during the era of silent films, though this work is a rare example of improvised music marshalled into some semblance of episodic shape for the pianist to play at home, a medium that remained one of powerful domestic communication as well as commanding a strong commercial attraction.

In the decade after the war there was an immediate outpouring of national grief at the realization and scale of the casualties. Joining the ranks of Stanford's *At the Abbey Gate* and unperformed mass 'Via Victrix' was John Fould's *World Requiem*, a piece inspired by the Cenotaph commemorations on 11 November. Frank Bridge, a pacifist by conviction, commemorated his close friendship with Ernest Farrar as part of the 'Beloved Vagabonds' at the Royal College of Music through his gloomy, but highly progressive *Piano Sonata*, after Farrar was killed close to the end of the war at the Battle of Ephey Ronssoy on 18 September 1918. Gustav Holst remembered his close friend, Cecil Coles, who had been killed in the last major German offensive in March 1918, in his *Ode to Death*. It was Holst, too, who rescued Cole's mud-stained manuscript suite, *Behind the Lines*, a set of pieces

¹² The five essays by Holbrooke appeared between 5 Nov. and 3 Dec. 1914.

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depicting scenes of army life during the war, which remained unfinished at his death.

Perhaps most significantly, however, was the sense of watershed which the war seemed to define. A new generation now turned its back without compunction on the pro-Teuton values that had been those of Parry, Stanford, Elgar, and others, and looked towards a future inspired by post-tonal techniques, atonality, bitonality, polytonality, serialism, jazz, neo-classicism, and the new manipulation of national 'raw' materials such as folksong. Holst was one such composer whose modernist interests had begun to emerge just before the war, and with the composition of *The Planets* during the conflict, his 'coming of age' as a contemporary composer gained important momentum. *The Planets* as a complete work did not actually come before the public until 1920, after several semi-public hearings in 1918 and 1919, but when it did, it was an instant success and the reaction to the opening movement, 'Mars', subtitled 'The Bringer of War', was immediately a response to mechanized warfare. Though the composer denied this, the combination of violent dissonance, the relentless irregular *ostinati*, and bitonal argument make this impression irresistible.

Out of *The Planets* came the patriotic tune THAXTED, better known as 'I vow to thee my country', which became a regular fixture at Armistice services after 1921, to a poem by Stanford's cousin, Cecil Spring-Rice. Another setting, this time of a highly popular poem by Kipling, 'Danny Deever', was published by Percy Grainger in 1922. Though the poem, from *Barrack-Room Ballads*, pertained to the Victorian British Army, its publication in 1922 must have awakened memories of one of the most tragic of events during the war, the execution of deserters. Kipling's poem portrays the macabre execution ceremony of Danny Deever (who was convicted of shooting a soldier in his sleep), the marching out at dawn into hollow square of the entire regiment, and the impressions of a private soldier and his comrades. During the war, of course, men were shot rather than hanged, but the same horror existed. Grainger's setting for solo baritone, male chorus, piano, and harmonium amplifies that sense of revulsion, and the grisly atmosphere is enhanced by the sounds of Kipling's vernacular English, an unforgiving colour sergeant, the harrowing scene of Danny struggling on the rope, and the march-refrain of increasingly traumatized soldiers '[wanting] their beer today'. The melodrama of

Grainger's almost Gothic setting stands in stark contrast to the heart-breaking setting of Kipling's 'Have you news of my boy Jack?', set by Edward German in 1917.

Perhaps two of the most vivid retrospective representations of the First World War were written in the 1920s by men who had fought in it and survived, and for whom the composition of music was a process of gradual catharsis. Vaughan Williams, over military age at the outbreak of hostilities, nevertheless volunteered as a private soldier and served with the Royal Medical Corps. As in the case of his artistic confrère, Holst, the war appears to have acted as a catalyst towards a new modernism in his style and heightened a sense of nationalism that he had already begun to embrace in the years directly before it. His third symphony, bearing the title *A Pastoral Symphony*, encouraged a degree of criticism among some commentators who accused the composer of a pastoral escapism, unaware that the work evoked a landscape not of rural England, but of war-torn scenes in northern France.¹³ Indeed, Vaughan Williams's haunting, restless canvas provides the very converse in its probing of 'hard pastoral' and its attempt to explore a range of disturbing personal emotions. Its distance from the traditional rhetoric of symphonic music, with its three slow movements avoiding the conventional movement types, makes it a problematic work to perform in the concert hall. In the second movement of the symphony Vaughan Williams creates a nocturne in which the tranquillity is disturbed only by a bugler, represented in the score by a natural trumpet. Adding to the realism of the representation are 'fluffed' notes created by the flattened overtone of the seventh, a feature which itself becomes an intrinsic part of the movement's cadenza as it rises to the point of structural return.

Vaughan Williams was troubled by the war throughout the 1920s, and the menace of future conflict in the 1930s gave rise to a plea for peace in his choral work *Dona Nobis Pacem* in 1936. Arthur Bliss, who much admired Vaughan Williams's work, was also deeply troubled by his own war experiences. As an officer he led attacks of the Royal Fusiliers at the Battle of the Somme and later, after 1917, fought with the Grenadier Guards. He was wounded twice and gassed once. But

¹³ See Alain Frogley, 'The Early Orchestral Works and the First Three Symphonies', in id. and Aidan J. Thomson (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams* (Cambridge, 2013), 100.

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more affecting was the death at the Somme of his brilliant brother, Francis Kennard, in October 1916. After the war, Bliss found it difficult to shake off both his grief for his elder brother and the nightmares of his own memories. A recurring one, he recalled in his autobiography *As I Remember*, was that the war was still going on while he, his comrades, and the Germans in the trenches opposite had been forgotten.

The pain of these recollections continued throughout the 1920s until he resolved to exorcize them in a choral symphony about war and courage, *Morning Heroes*, in 1930. This was an experimental series of movements involving reciter, chorus, and orchestra using a variety of poems about war from across the millennia, from Li Tai Po, Homer, and Walt Whitman to two contemporary poets who had shared his experience, Wilfred Owen and Robert Nichols. In the finale to the work, 'Spring Offensive' and 'Dawn on the Somme', Bliss perhaps comes closest to that most chilling of events that haunts us all in our imaginings of those extraordinary hours before lines of soldiers, bayonets fixed, went over the top to their doom. His concept of Wilfred Owen's stark poem portrays such a surreal scene, accompanied only by timpani, whose gentle rumbles at first evoke the sound of the distant guns but, at the same time, embody that restless energy and pent-up fear.

Halted against the shade of a last hill,
They fed, and, lying easy, were at ease
And, finding comfortable chests and knees
Carelessly slept. But many there stood still
To face the stark, blank sky beyond the ridge,
Knowing their feet had come to the end of the world.¹⁴

At the climax of the poem, as the soldiers pile over to face, as we know, a German army ready for them in spite of the most fearsome of Allied barrages, the timpani assume the role of the relentless machine gun and artillery fire until, by degrees, they return to their initial pianissimo dynamic as the attack peters out. Finally, as a form of musical balm, Bliss elides his musical recitation with an assuaging, elegiac siciliano for chorus and orchestra.

¹⁴ *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. Owen Knowles (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1994), 99.

We can adduce from this wide and varied evidence that, for British composers at least, the sights and sounds of the First World War in music were a very real concern and one germane to expression. Reasons for this desire to capture them, often so vividly, is difficult to define, but most likely it was connected with an ongoing cultural change in musical reception and the perception of music's role in society that had been taking place before the war. All the composers mentioned in this article were raised essentially on a diet of German precepts, of Brahmsian organicism in which the intellectual argument of the musical notes brought a sense of 'unity' to the work's content. It was a principle to which Parry and Stanford cleaved and which they fervently promulgated, exhorting their students to consider intellect rather than colour as the highest goal. Their expressions of the war, though powerful in their own way, were tempered by this principle.

With the popularity and vividness of Elgar's orchestral scores, however, a shift in critical perception was taking place in which the older Teutonic ideals were, in part, the subject of aesthetic rejection. The ultimate paradigm of cerebral content was lost to an audience hungry for the pictorial, the programme, and the colourful. This was accentuated by the immense interest in Richard Strauss during his visits to London at the turn of the century, but also by a new eclecticism which was ready to embrace the sensuality of French and Russian music. Combined with a wave of cultural nationalism, partly, but not wholly, enshrined in the folksong, this helped shape the musical generations that would go to war and their readiness to embrace a more programmatic and illustrative style of expression in their musical works.

Society's musical voice was also changing. Composers and performers reflected the range of social classes and this was paralleled in uniform, from the simplest private soldier to the officer, all of whom died together indiscriminately in the conflagration. This, albeit unwittingly, spawned a shared, more democratic experience in which the trauma of the battlefield, the immense casualties, and sense of personal loss served only to intensify a new wave of expression in which sights and sounds, horrendous, even nightmarish, as they were, contributed to a realist form of artistic communication, and one that could readily be understood by a wider audience.

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